LOOKOUT

An Illustrated Novella
by Dan Baillie
and Tim Bradstreet

AWA VERTIGO ENTERTAINMENT

A FUTURE OF FEAR ONE-SHOT with Acclaimed Producer ROY LEE

@awastudiosofficial @AWA.studios @awastudiosofficial @AWA_studios awastudios.com

Axel Alonso Chief Creative Officer
Matthew Anderson Co-Chair & CEO
Rohan Chatterjee Executive Assistant
Michael Coast Senior Editor
Bob Cohen EVP, General Counsel
Nahuel Fanjul-Arguijo Director, Marketing
Chris Ferguson Art Director
Christina Lan Technology Development Manager
Kevin Park VP, Legal Affairs
Diya Sagar Chief Financial Officer
Zach Studin President, AWA Studios
Mike Tjaden Sales & Operations Analyst

The FUTURE OF FEAR

Foreword by ROY LEE

I hope this book transports and terrifies you the way it shook me. *LOOK OUT* is the first installment in **Future of Fear**, a new collection of stories that I'm thrilled to bring you in partnership with AWA.

As a film and television producer, I'm always searching for the next great story. Over the years, I've had the privilege of discovering some unnerving gems like *Barbarian*, *Late Night with the Devil*, *Strange Darling*, *It*, and the *Bates Motel* TV series. I'm particularly drawn to stories that evoke a deep, universal fear—often set in environments that are uniquely unsettling.

That's probably why some of the darkest, most twisted, and original storytellers thrive in graphic fiction. These writers and artists are constantly finding innovative ways to blend suspenseful prose with bone-chilling illustrations, creating experiences that scare the daylights out of you. Working with world-class artists to bring such compelling narratives to life visually is truly rare—and something I can't wait for you to experience.

Of course, I also jumped at the chance to work closely with AWA, whose work I've long admired, to bring you this collection. Our mission with **Future of Fear** is to spotlight exceptional voices through a groundbreaking set of horror stories. We've scoured both traditional and unconventional places to bring you these new tales, each terrifying in its own way, packed with all the dread, shock, and adrenaline you'd expect from masters of the craft.

I'm glad you've hopped on board. Things are about to take a nightmarish turn!

Roy Lee
Vertigo Entertainment
January 2, 2025

TIM BRADSTREET
2024

After my divorce, I had nothing.

Wanting to start over, I had moved out to a crappy apartment in a new city, had no real job, no pets, no kids, and, obviously, no wife. No real connections to the rest of the world. I was just existing. I was constantly applying to any job I could find and had landed a shitty job in a shitty café, serving shitty coffee to shitty people. I was bored and miserable, and despite only recently relocating to another city, I needed a more drastic change. And now, I've hit the jackpot.

Hidden amidst all those random applications I had submitted was one for a fire lookout in the middle of the woods, no prior experience needed. That's right, a fire lookout—those people who live isolated in a seventy-foot tower in the middle of the woods, looking out for fires and narcing on campers. I vividly remember filling this one out because I had found it odd, as it stated the role was currently filled, but they were accepting applicants "in case it suddenly becomes available." I remember thinking, *weird*, but going for it anyway. And now, I've got the job!

I had received a phone call from a gruff-sounding guy who told me the pay and that I'd be living in the tower until the end of summer, so around two months. He also told me it was imperative I start right away, providing me with directions and informing me that I would be starting tomorrow if I were to accept, which I did. So, here's to a fresh start!

I've just parked my car in the furthest point of the woods it can possibly go, and now I'm going to have to hike to the tower. It's just past 8 a.m., and Mark, the guy who gave me the call, said the hike will take about four hours. So, I'm setting off now expecting to be there for lunch. Mark assured me there will be a full stock of food at my tower, my new home, and that I'll be able to radio the nearest tower, where I'll receive the lowdown of how everything works. It's chilly for a summer morning, but I'm very excited for the hike, as the woods in these parts are known for their beauty and quiet atmosphere, something I've longed for.

AWA Studios and Vertigo Entertainment present
A FUTURE OF FEAR ONE-SHOT

LOOK OUT

Written by Dan Baillie
Illustrated by Tim Bradstreet

Logo & book design by Chris Ferguson
Edited by Michael Coast and Axel Alonso

I've finally arrived at the tower, just past 1 p.m.

The hike was challenging but easy to navigate, as it was well signposted and had a clear trail. The tower is much bigger than I thought it'd be; I'd estimate it's around one hundred feet tall, with just a hut on the top of the four stilts, a winding staircase around the outside leading up to it. Next to the tower, an outhouse and storage unit, which I'm guessing is where the food is stored. I'll explore later once I get into my hut and set my rucksack down.

The stairs are a hell of a climb, but I'll get used to it. The hut is small, and has a balcony all around the outside. Inside there's a bed, a big radio, a table with a map, some books, a toolbox, a smaller portable radio, a lamp, binoculars, and a flashlight. Each side of the hut is essentially a large window, so from the inside I can see outstretched woods all around me. Creepy, but makes sense, as I'm literally keeping an eye out for fires. I set my rucksack down and remember what Mark had said about radioing the nearest tower for direction, so I do.

"Hello? Is anybody there?" I ask as I fumble with the big radio.

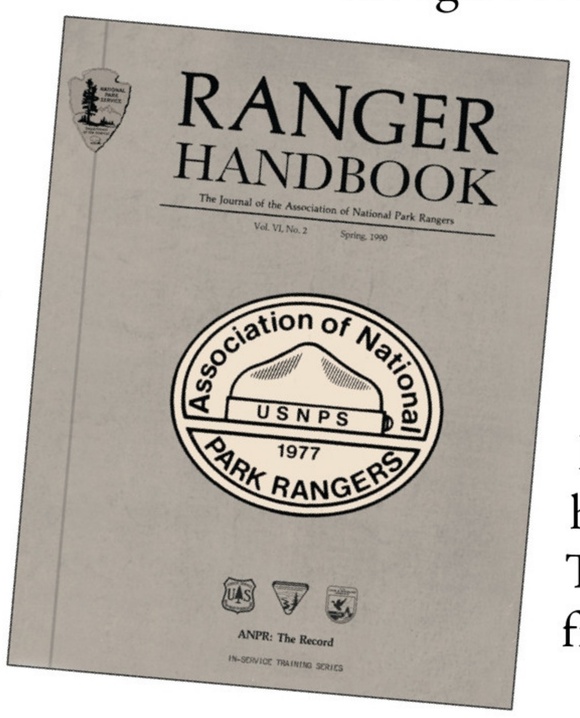
"Hey! You're the new guy, aren't you? I'm Allison," a chirpy-sounding woman replies through the static. "I've been covering your part of the woods while you were making the journey here, but I can't really see too far into it, so I'm glad you're here!"

"Nice to meet you, yeah, I'm the new guy, Oscar," I radio back. "Mark said you could give me the lowdown?"

"I can! Well, you've already figured out how to work out the radio, so that's a start. The bathrooms are at the bottom of the tower. So is the food stock, which gets topped off every week by Mark or his son. As for the actual job, it's a lot of looking around, making sure nobody is camping at night when they shouldn't be and making sure no fires are started." Allison went on, "Also making sure the paths are all clear, but it's all in the handbook, which should be on your desk. Give that a read."

"Thanks, Allison. I'll give that a shot and get back to you," I enthusiastically reply. "I'll radio if I have any questions!"

No response. Cool. She seems pleasant enough. I reach for the handbook and flick through it. It basically says everything she had just told me, just in more mumbo-jumbo technical terms, but I'll study it back to front to make sure I do a good job. As I flick through, a piece of paper falls out of the handbook. It's lined paper, which has been handwritten in black ink. The handwriting is messy, almost frantic. The paper reads:



Rules to avoid the Weeping Lady

1. If you see a woman in the woods weeping to herself, don't approach her or draw attention to yourself. return to your tower.

2. If your Radio goes off and it's anyone except your closest tower, don't answer it, no matter what you hear.

3. If you hear a woman weeping between the hours of 1am - 4am, Ignore it.

4. At night, always sleep with your lamp on. If it starts to flicker, Quickly Run to turn on your main light until morning. If your lamp flickers off completely befor you can do this, hide under your Bed until <u>morning</u>.

5. At night, if you hear someone running up the stairs to your tower, turn on the main light until morning. If you don't do this by the time she's at the top, it's too late

6. If you wake up, and see the Weeping Lady staring at you through your window, hide under your covers and hold your breath. She will come into your hut and you will feel her breathing right above you as if she is hovering over you. **DO NOT** breathe. this will last only a few seconds. Once you feel her leave, turn on the main light until morning.

7. If you hear scratching at any point, either by your hut or by the outhouse, turn off all Radios and hide under your covers until the Scratching stops.

8. If you are investigating a campfire at night, and upon your arrival you hear a woman screaming Run back to the tower as fast as you can.

9. If at any point you are returning to your tower and you notice someone else inside it, RUN. Do not Stop running until you reach the next tower. Don't look back. she will be chasing you.

What the hell? Is this some sick, creepy joke? I reach for the radio to ask Allison about it, but I don't want to be the new guy who falls for the prank, so I decide to just leave it. Instead, I'll explore the area a bit and finally eat some food, get settled in.

"Good night, dude!"

Allison radios in just as I am drifting off to my first night.

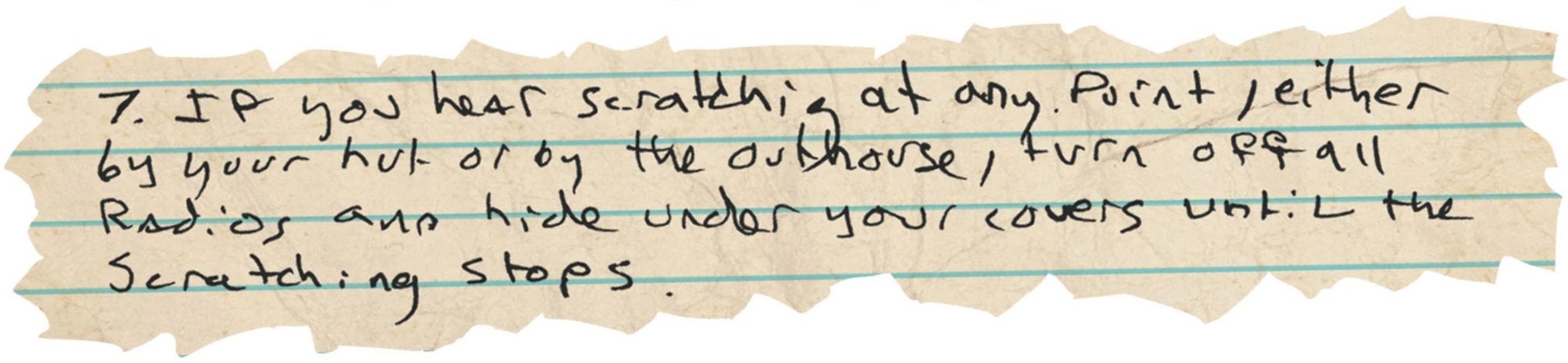
I jolt out of sleep with a fright and hastily radio back, "Night, Allison. Thanks for the help today!"

My first day is done. After eating, I had explored the woods and become acquainted with the machete used for clearing paths, which was great stress relief. I had also read up on some of the laws of the woods and further responsibilities of the job. Allison had popped up occasionally just to check in, but I never brought up the weird rules I found.

And now I am wide awake, probably from the fright I had gotten from the radio she gave wishing me goodnight. I stand up out of bed and look around me, seeing nothing but the forest. It is dark and creepy, but the darkness is a good thing—no fires! I know that at night there are other watchers; fewer are needed, as fire is much easier to spot at night, but it is still important that I know what to do if it was me that spotted one.

I'm about to hop back into bed when I hear a faint scratching noise. That's strange, but it's probably an animal down by the storage box, scratching, trying to get in. Jumping into bed, tired after the first day, I reach down to turn my lamp off. Just as I do this, the scratching gets faster, almost as if whatever is making it is getting excited. I move my hand away from the lamp switch, and the scratching slows. That's odd. What else is weird is that the scratching seems almost methodical; it has a rhythm to it. Suddenly, both my radios start to emit a high-pitched noise.

Practically shitting myself, I hop out of bed and turn off the portable radio, and just as I'm fiddling with the bigger radio, I catch a glimpse of the list of rules I had seen earlier. There was something about scratching in those, wasn't there? Oh shit. I'm not the superstitious type, but I ain't taking any chances, so I quickly grab the list:



Fuck. I turn off the big radio and jump under my covers. What the fuck, man? I can still hear the scratching, but it sounds closer. It sounds like it has gone from being a distant noise to being right on the wooden door of my hut.

It is weak now, as if whatever is making it is lightly dragging their fingernails across the door frame. I ain't moving. What the fuck is it?

It's the next morning.

I had eventually fallen asleep under the covers last night. The scratching had stopped but I didn't move from my covers at all, eventually letting tiredness take over. Looking back, I feel kind of stupid. I'm in the woods, there's a fuck-ton of animals, and radios can pick up on all types of feedback. I guess it makes sense that the first night was the hardest, trying to adjust to living one hundred feet up, alone, in the middle of the woods. Ah well, I'm going to make the most of the day today! I'm sure the rest of the nights will be much less eventful.

I can't stop thinking about that scratching noise last night. What was it? It had to be an animal, right? Fuck, I hope it's an animal. I'm also trying to not think about that list, but, man, it's hard not to. I've brought it with me, just in case, although I feel sort of silly doing it. I bet it's a prank—it's only my second day and I'm already being pranked. My mind is racing around the place. Anyway, I'm currently on a patrol, just walking some of the routes and pathways, making sure nobody is camping in any of the openings. It's getting dark,

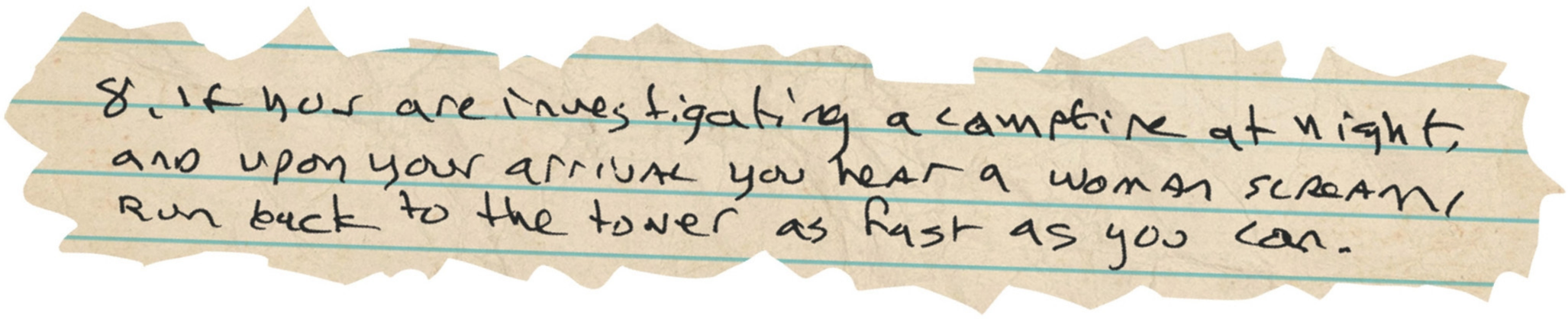
so I think I'm going to head back. I'm just about to take a turn that will circle me back to my tower when I catch a glimpse of a campsite. Here we go, my first real task: telling campers that they have to pack up and leave; this area is for hiking only. I head on over; the campsite has been set up in a large clearing in the trees. There's just a single reddish-yellow tent and a dried-out firepit.

"Hello?" I call out. "You can't be camping here; it's for hiking only."

Silence. No reply. I walk closer to the campsite, veering towards the firepit in case something jumps out of the tent at me—I'm such a wimp. I call out again.

"Hello? Is anyone there?"

Nothing. That's when I start to feel weird. Something doesn't feel right. I can't explain it; it's just off. I'm sure whoever has set this up is just hiking and will be back, but it's already almost dark, which makes me worry. *Wait, there is a rule about this*, I think. I take the list out of my pocket and quickly scan it. Sure enough:



Okay, well, not okay. But okay. I haven't heard a scream. It's just an empty campsite; there isn't even a live fire. I'll radio Allison.

"Allison, hey, there's a campsite here. No fire, but no people either. What should I do?"

"Whereabouts is it?" Allison replies instantly.

I give her my coordinates after referring to the map, using my flashlight to view as it edges closes to complete darkness.

"I got it; it's just on the edge of my zone. I'll head down there now. You just go back to your tower, okay?" Allison responds.

"Right. You sure?" I ask.

"Positive. Head back, be safe."

Okay, she's the pro. I'll radio her asking how it's going when I get back. I walk for about 30 minutes, almost back at my tower, when I spot a clear pathway that juts off into the trees. Weird, I don't remember seeing that on the map. I thought the road I was on had no paths leading off of it. Figuring I had just missed it in the morning and that I'll check it out tomorrow, I trudge on back to my tower.

Once back, I sit at my desk and stare at the rules. I haven't asked Allison about them and don't want to unless something else weird happens. Tonight wasn't even weird; I just found an empty campsite. No woman's wails like the rules warned. I've been sitting here reading the rules for about 20 minutes when my main radio goes off.

"Hey, Oscar. I've dealt with the camper. He says he was taking a shit by some trees and wasn't aware he wasn't allowed to camp here," Allison explains. "He must have been doing his business when you were by the site. I'm walking him to his car now. All good."

"Okay, thanks for dealing with that. Goodnight!" I respond, feeling bad she trekked all the way out there for that, as I get into bed.

It's the next afternoon.

Last night was fine, no issues. I'm feeling more safe and secure now and have left the list on my table today. I've spent the morning eating a lot. I think my appetite is growing due to all the walking around. I've just been staring a lot out at the woods from my tower, which is calming. It's time for my late afternoon rounds to make sure nobody is camping, but first I

want to check out that weird trail that ain't on any maps.

I get to it quite quickly. It's relatively close, and sure enough it's as clear a trail as any. It's as if it has been maintained just as well as the main ones. I trudge along it, not expecting much. It's a bit downhill but not a hard walk. I've been walking for about five minutes, and I think I can see the end of the trail. And that's all I see: just an end. That's kind of shitty—this leads to literally nothing; just a wall of trees. I'm just about to turn back when I see it. There's a small, red handkerchief around the branch of a nearby tree. Interesting. I walk up to it, and just as I approach it, I see another one slightly deeper in the woods. And behind that, another one. Oh fuck, am I about to be an idiot and walk straight into the arms of a serial killer if I follow these? As if I want to prove to myself that I'm not scared, I'm going to follow them.

I have gone past five handkerchiefs, each plain red with no inscriptions or anything, and am about to reach another. The difference is that this one is on the ground; the rest were all on branches. Past this one, I can't see any more. That's a bit annoying. I sigh as I reach down to pick up the last handkerchief

to inspect it. *What the fuck?* This is tied around something, something wooden, kind of heavy. I heave it up, and dirt rises off a wooden door as it reveals a small bunker. This is fucking cool! It's about ten feet deep and a couple of feet wide and has a ladder on its wall by where the door was lifted.

I shine my flashlight in, seeing a sleeping bag and a camera on the floor below. That's it. I climb down the ladder. It's sturdy; feels like it

has been crafted well. In fact, the whole bunker seems pretty clean for being supposedly abandoned and in the middle of the woods. Protruding from the camera, a charger is attached—although obviously not plugged into a wall socket given the fact I'm, well, in an underground bunker. I pick it up and try to turn it on. It's dead. It's a relatively modern camera, has a screen to view pictures on one side, which seems fine other than boasting a slight crack—a war wound! The main lens of the camera, though, has been smashed; looks like its picture-taking days are over. I'm charging this as soon as I get back to my tower. I'm excited to see what's on it. I'll radio Allison about it when I get back. Otherwise, she'll know I'm starting my actual rounds late.

You'll never fucking guess.

The campsite from last night is back! Hell, it looks like whoever was here never left! It's exactly where I saw it last night. Has this guy come back thinking he could sneak back to the exact same spot? I'm literally looking at the same reddish-yellow tent in the same position! The only difference is that the campfire is lit this time around, which is the only other light provided other than from my flashlight. Annoyed, I figure I'll deal with this guy and then radio Allison the good news: that I dealt with it myself.

I march up to the tent and reach to pull back the cover. I don't care if I give him a fright, he shouldn't be here and he knows that. I pull the cover off.

Wait, what? There's nothing in the tent. I mean, nothing. No person, no sleeping bag, no rucksack. Just dirt. The fire burns strongly behind me, and I swivel around toward it, scanning the trees beyond its fiery glow. It feels like something is staring at me. I quickly kick the fire and pour what's left of my water on it to put it out, plunging myself into darkness. The fire is out. I keep my flashlight pointed at the ground because I can't bear to look at the trees beyond the campfire, still feeling uneasy.

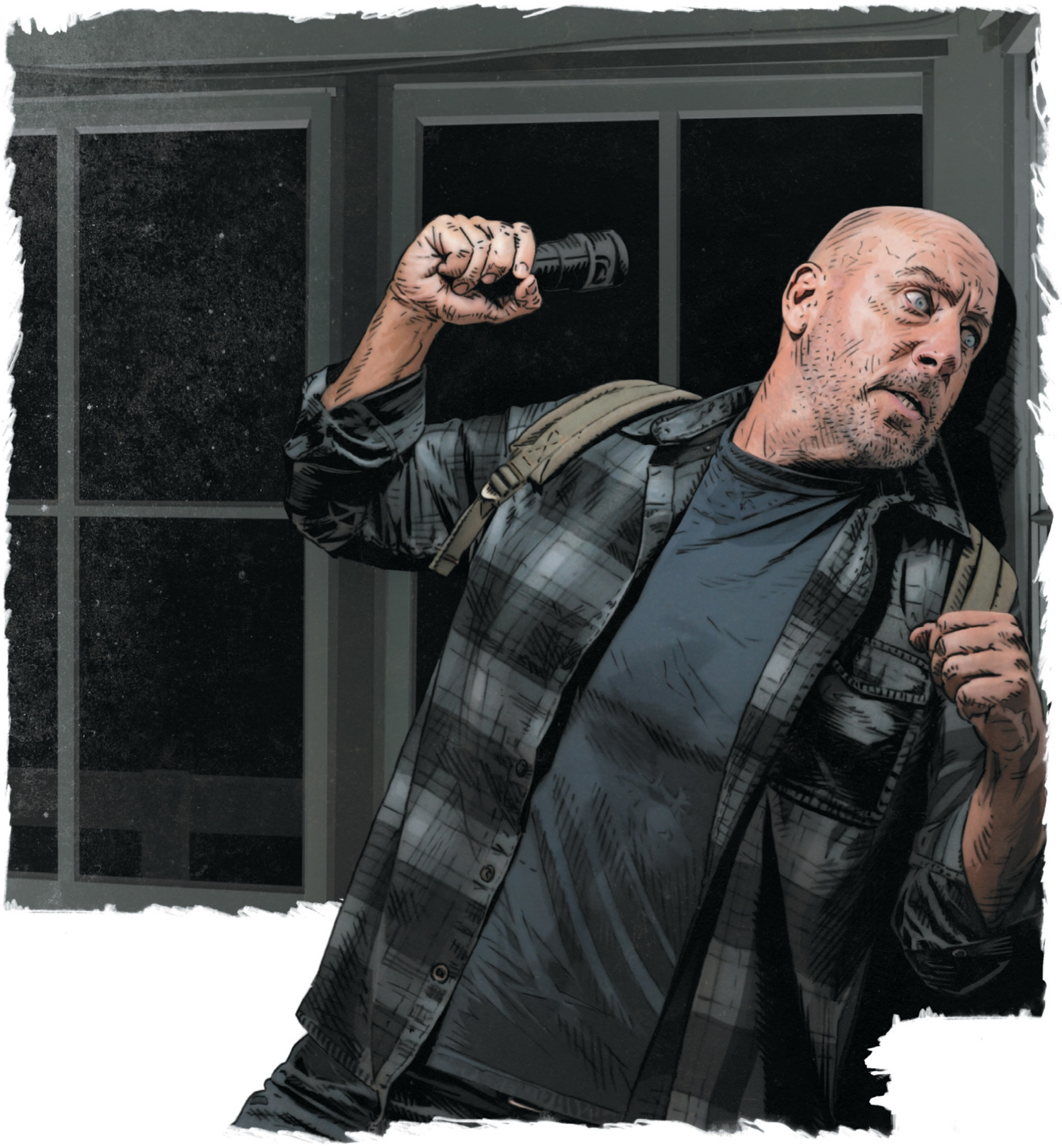
I reach to radio Allison.

A bloodcurdling scream pierces the silence, coming from the growth of trees just beyond the campfire. *Holy shit.* The scream is one that I could never have imagined. It's a scream of pure pain, pure rage. A dark figure bursts from the trees, screaming all the while, and starts to run at me. I only make out part of its silhouette before turning to run myself, but I note the shape of a human: a woman with long hair and arms flailing loosely by her side as she sprints at me.

I'm running through the woods that I'm only just coming to learn, staying on the path I know leads back to my tower. She hasn't stopped screaming, still chasing me, the long, drawn-out scream all I can hear, piercing my thoughts and overwhelming my brain. Making a sharp turn on the path, I start to scream myself, although I can't even hear my own over hers. I'm over halfway back to the tower. Do I look back? *Holy fuck*. I can't, it'll slow me down. *What the fuck.* The scream is getting louder, she's fucking gaining on me. How the fuck is she still screaming?! The tower! I see the dim glow from the lamp I had left on in the hut above, breaching the darkness ahead of me, providing me with hope.

I reach the stairs, bolting up them at full speed. The winding staircase is uneven in places, so I'm stumbling every few steps, but I've yet to lose my balance. Halfway up, I hear

8. If you are investigating a campfire at night,
and upon your arrival you hear a woman scream,
Run back to the tower as fast as you can.



her bolt onto the first few steps. She is fast, I can hear it. She is gaining on me, but I think I can make it. I'm at the top. I run into my hut and as I slam the door, the screams suddenly stop. I wedge up against the door, adrenaline pumping, holding my flashlight in my right hand, ready to fight. The sudden silence doesn't help. At least when she was screaming, I knew where she was. My ears are still ringing, though, as I stay heaved against the door.

It's been an hour now since the wailing stopped, and since then I haven't heard a sound. My adrenaline has died, but I'm still fucking terrified. I'm finally going to move from the door and radio Allison, unable to speak before from the fear. If this is a prank, then it's fucked up. Although, for my sake, I do still hope it is a prank. I turn the main radio on.

"Allison?" I anxiously gasp. "Allison, fucking answer."

After what feels like an hour's silence—but was probably only half a minute or so—I hear a croaky moan.

". . . *mmmmmmm.*"

That's not Allison, is it?

"*Mmmmmm . . . mmm.*" It is a woman's voice, sounds in pain. What if that freaky thing that chased me got to Allison? Just as I am about to respond to check up on her, the radio sounds again.

What starts as another moan gets louder, turning into a scream. It's the same fucking scream. The same scream that will haunt my dreams, tainting them in pain and anger. She is screaming through my radio. I slam it off.

"Good morning man!

How'd you sleep?" Allison chirps the next morning.

"Allison," I reply wearily from my lack of sleep the previous night, "what the fuck is this list I found?"

"What list?" Allison radios back. I explain everything that has happened, from finding the list, to the scratching, to being chased by that thing last night. Allison sighs deeply, as if to say, "Here we go again."

"This has happened before. In fact, it happens to every person who gets assigned your tower," Allison states. "I don't know what to believe anymore. At first, I thought it was just people going crazy from the isolation. I mean, I've never seen anything! But after Harvey... and you, after only, what, four days? I don't know what to believe."

"Harvey?" I reply. "Who's Harvey?"

"The guy before you. He lived in your tower for over a year, refused to ever go home or take a holiday," Allison explains. "He was a tough guy, good with his hands. He always had a project going on. Sometimes, towards the end, I wouldn't hear from him for days. I think he spent entire nights out of his tower. No idea where he went, though."

"Towards the end?" I ask. I wasn't letting that slide by.

"Yeah, he disappeared. Mark thinks he ran off. His tower was apparently just empty when he checked up on him. No bags, no belongings, no Harvey. But I don't know. Why would he just quit after a year of refusing to leave the woods at all?" Allison goes on, "But in the months leading up to his disappearance, he became obsessed with what he called a 'Weeping Lady.' Claimed he would see her at night, but he never went into detail. If I questioned him, he would just stop replying. Like I said, he didn't talk to me much."

Hmm. But him suddenly upping and leaving doesn't explain why the job advertisement stated the job may "suddenly become available," so I question Allison on that.

"I don't know about that," she replies. "I've been working here two years and Mark still never tells me anything."

"And who worked here before Harvey?" I ask.

"Another guy, Rick," Allison says through the crackle of her radio. "He left a few days after I started, but he asked me once if I had seen a woman in the woods, a crying woman. I said no, thought nothing of it, thought he was weird."

I don't feel content with the amount of information I'm receiving and am unsure if she genuinely doesn't know much or is hiding something. So, I decide to ask about her.

"What made you take this job?"

"Well, fuck, I guess we're opening up to each other this morning, are we?" Allison chuckles nervously. I don't reply, waiting for her to answer my question.

"My sister, she went missing. In these woods," Allison sighs, voice trembling. "It was right before I started. I took the job to, I don't know, try to find her? Or try to help others who might get lost. I don't know."

"I'm sorry about your sister, Allison." I feel guilty for asking. "That's courageous of you, though."

I'm not going to ask any more questions. Not yet. I'm not sure how much she's actually telling me, but at the moment it feels like she's my ally, and I want to keep it that way. I thank her for talking to me. I trust her, I think. I feel a bit more at ease, although I'm not sure why. Harvey apparently just disappeared, and both he and Rick claim to have seen the Weeping Lady. Was that the lady that chased me last night?

The camera I had found is now charged up. It's evening. I still haven't slept. I've not really moved. I've just been trying to make sense of all the information Allison gave me, but I can't. Maybe the camera will provide some answers. It flickers on. On the screen, three choices: Photo, Gallery, Settings. I choose Gallery.

The first few photos aren't exciting. There's a few pictures of a random lake, a random

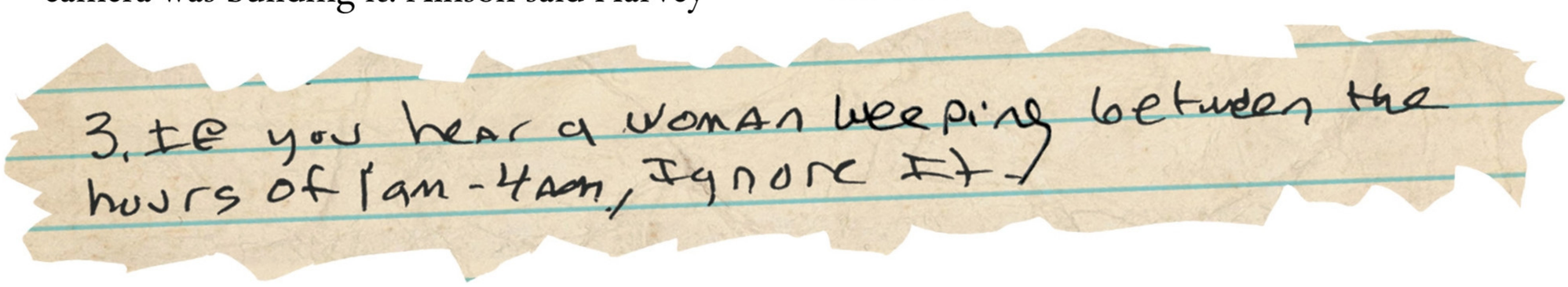
house, a random car. Nothing that helps me. Scanning through them at such a fast pace, I almost don't realize that I'd skimmed over a picture of the tower. My tower. And at the base of the tower, a family. A family of three. The father has dark hair, is quite tall, and looks as if he's experienced with the outdoors. Big, sturdy guy. The mother, a blonde woman with a beautiful smile, her arm on her husband's shoulder. The third member is a child, a boy with short brown hair and a striking resemblance to the man who I guess to be his father. I continue to look through the photos but no longer see the family together, only the man. He is taking selfies inside my tower, taking photos of the view from my window, of the outhouse and of some of the trails. Is this Harvey? Or Rick? If it is Harvey, why would he not want to leave the woods to see his family?

Then the photos get stranger. The next photo is of a bunker. *The* bunker. The one with the red handkerchief. It looks unfinished, a work in progress, but with each photo, it looks more complete. Whoever had this camera was building it. Allison said Harvey was good with his hands, didn't she? Why would he build a bunker in the woods? And why so close to the tower? The next photo, a random tree in the darkness. In fact, the next four or five photos are of this tree. At the base of the tree, a shadow. A weird, distorted shadow. A shadow that doesn't make sense. Was Harvey, or whoever this guy is, trying to take a photo of something? Was he trying to take a photo of the Weeping Lady?

What the fuck was that noise?

What time is it? 2:13 a.m. Something just woke me up. I can't hear anything now, but something definitely woke me up. I'm so tired from the night before that I wouldn't have just woken up on my own accord. Maybe it's a—

I hear faint crying. A woman's cry. It doesn't sound too close, but I sit up in bed as I listen to the long, mournful wails. I know this rule:



Except I can't ignore it. It sounds so sad, so broken. Part of me wants to go and help her; the other part of me wants to investigate and get answers. No part of me wants to ignore it.

Quietly as I can, I slide on my gear, grab my flashlight and radio, and open the door to my hut. I carefully descend the stairs, shining the light at my feet to ensure I don't trip. The crying is coming from an area of the woods off the path, so I carefully tread towards the dark cluster of trees.

The cries are of such pain, such sadness. I can only compare them to that of a mother who has lost her child, wailing in complete despair, losing a part of her soul with every agonizing sob. My flashlight is off now, as the crying is getting louder. I'm crouched down, moving bush to bush, tree to tree. The air is foggy, cold; it gets colder the closer to the sound I get. As I crouch behind a tree, I see her.

She's sitting down by a tree, her face covered, crying into her hands. She is sitting in profile and has long, dark hair that sprawls down her back and rests in the dirt. Although I can't see it too clearly, she wears a gown, which seems clean and undamaged. What is damaged, though, are her arms. Her arms are twisted, broken. One of her elbows is bent backwards, with bone jutting out under the skin from both her forearms although

not piercing through. Her fingernails, long. Sharp. Not an ounce of meat on her, her body almost skeletal. Her pale white skin glows in the darkness, hugging her collar bone, accentuating her bony figure.

My radio statics. Only for a second. I quickly look down to turn it off, and as I do, I realize—the crying has stopped. I'm still looking down at my radio. Fuck, she heard me. I can't look up. I feel sick. Do I run now? She might not have heard me. I force myself to take action and slowly look up at her. She's looking at me. She has hollow, dark, wide eyes. They are lifeless. The whites of her eyes provide a drastic contrast to her dark pupils. Her eyebrows are raised. On her face, remnants of the tears she had cried. Some tears still drip off her sharp cheekbones, down her narrow neck.

I'm about to run. I can't look away from her, but I'm trying to convince myself to fucking run. I need to run. I've been staring at her for about half a minute and she hasn't moved, her eyes still locked with mine. Just as I'm about to muster the courage to turn my back on her and run, she moves. In one quick motion, her neck snaps to the side with a click, and she crawls into the darkness beyond her, the movement so fast, her broken arms cracking as she shoots away. This is my chance. I turn to run.

I run hard, don't look back. I'm dodging some trees, running into others, but not stopping. Why did she just leave me alone like that? *Fuck*. There's the tower. I run up the stairs, stumbling into my hut, and slam the door. I hear nothing. From the safety of my hut, I look around the base of the tower, the woods around me. I see nothing. Fuck it, I'm getting under my covers. I turn my lamp on and jump into bed. Shaking, I try to calm myself so that I can listen to my surroundings, listening out for her over my pounding heartbeat. But I hear nothing. There is nothing but silence. Just as I peep out from my covers, building up the courage to radio Allison, I see it: scratch marks on the floor of my hut.

Marks that weren't there before. Marks I must have missed when I raced in. They look like something made by an animal.

Made by something crawling.

The marks go from the door of my hut, all the way across the room to my bed.

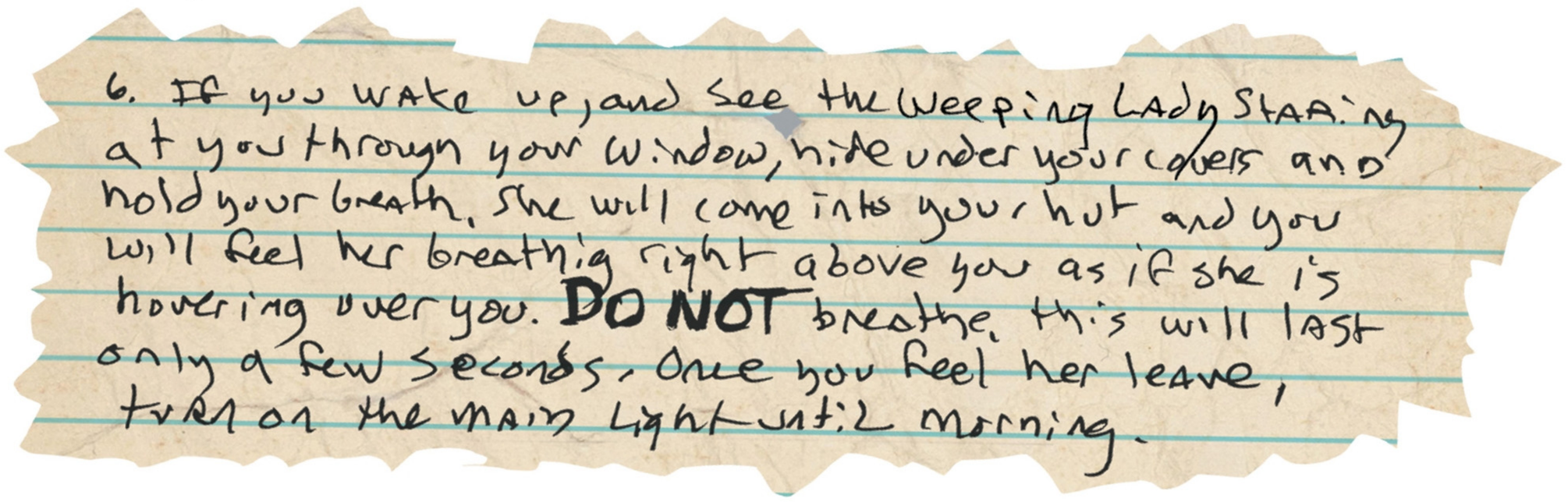
I couldn't see her outside before because she was already inside the hut with me.

She beat me to the tower.

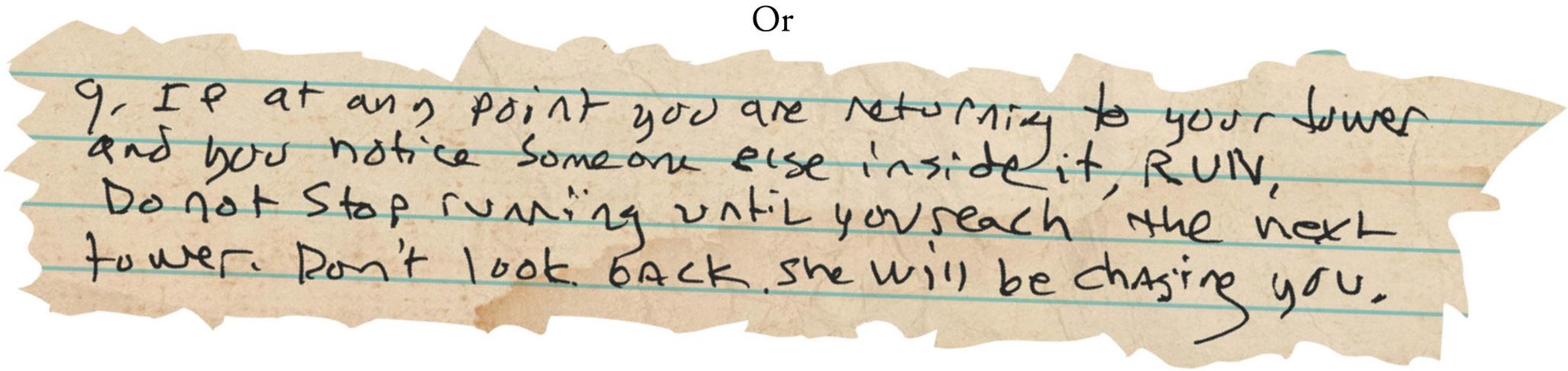
She's under the bed.

I'm fucking frozen.

I know she's there. I can feel it. She's under my bed. What do I do? I think back to the rules. Was there anything about this? There are two rules that could help, but I don't know which one to follow:



Or



Do I hide under my covers until she leaves, like in rule 6?

Or do I run because she's inside my tower, like in rule 9? She was already inside it when I entered, so that's rule 9, right?

I hear her. Not loud, but I hear her. The kind of sound made when someone is trying to move slowly while trying to not break the silence. The slightest shuffle. A second later, a slight cracking noise. She's moving. With the movement, a low, stifled groan. I close my eyes. I need to make up my mind. Do I stay under my covers or run?

Rule 6 or rule 9?

I feel the slightest tug at the bottom of my covers. It isn't a hard tug and only lasts a second. Following this, a second tug, slightly harder than the last.

I choose rule 9.

With a violent explosion of speed, I leap out of my bed and burst through the door as it slams behind me. I don't see her; I don't look. Luckily, I'm already in my shoes from earlier.

I'm halfway down the tower when I hear a bang above me, recognizing it as the door slamming as she leaves the hut.

I'm at the bottom of my tower, and I hear steps above me. She's halfway down the tower.

I'm running towards the path, and I hear the shuffle of dirt and grass behind me. She's at the bottom of my tower.

I'm running towards the bunker, the noise behind me getting louder. She's catching up. She's on the path.

I reach the bunker and quickly open it.

TIM & BRAD-STREET 2024

I swing onto the ladder and shut the panel above me.

I hear her.

She's moving around above me, on the wood and the grass around it. Her low moans freeze me, my hairs stand on end, as she croaks in anguish. I'm in the corner of the bunker staring up toward the door, but I can't see it through the darkness. She's still above me; I hear her movements. They're a mix of fast, sudden jolts, and slow, almost confused, movements. Maybe she didn't see me go into the bunker. Maybe she doesn't even know about it. Or can she not get in? Is this where Harvey would spend his nights when he wasn't at the tower? Allison said she didn't know where he would spend some of his nights. Was it here?

I can't hear anything now; it's been about twenty minutes. I think the creature above me has gone, but I'm done being an idiot. I'm staying here till morning.

I eventually drift off to the calm sound of the wind caressing nearby trees.

So, last night was too close.

Looking back on my decision to investigate, I feel stupid. I'm not sure if it was from my lack of sleep, or that she cast some fucked-up spell on me, but I won't be making decisions like that again. I'm going to be a stickler to the rules. It's morning, I'm still in the bunker. I eventually build up the courage to lift the panel above me and peep out, blinded by the sunlight after being enshrouded in darkness for so long. All looks clear. Wary, I climb out and head to my tower.

I'm quickly climbing the stairs to my tower when I hear a voice behind me.

"Hello!"

I nearly shit myself, spinning around and almost falling off the side of the staircase. There's a girl at the base of my tower—a normal-looking girl. She has brown hair and glasses and is carrying a large knapsack. She's wearing hiking gear and is smiling at me.

"Sorry to scare you," she says. "Hi, I'm Samantha. Sam."

I'm still just staring at her, heart pounding.

"Mark's daughter?" she explains. "Here to top off your food?"

Allison had mentioned that Mark or his son would be here for that; no mention of a daughter.

"Oh, hey," I reply, voice shaking. "Sorry, you scared me. I'm, uh, Oscar."

"Hey, Sam," she reiterates. "Are you okay?"

I force a weak smile and nod, "Just gave me a fright, that's all. I thought it was Mark or his son that tops this off."

She laughs. "It usually is. I've just kind of recently started helping out, I guess. You're actually my first stop today. It's nice to meet you, Oscar!"

It's getting dark now.

I'm feeling determined to find out what's happening in these woods. Don't get me wrong—I'm scared shitless. But I'm done making bad choices. As far as I know, I could be on my own. I don't know who to trust. Allison, maybe? I'll need to see. Just before heading to bed, I radio her to ask her something.

"Hey, Allison," I say, "does Mark have a daughter?"

"Oscar, hey," Allison replies a minute later. "I was about to radio you goodnight. I'm not too sure about that, have only met his son. Why?"

"Okay. I was just wondering."

"You okay, Oscar? Has something else happened?" she asks.

"I'm fine, Allison. Goodnight."

I'm still terrified, but I know what I need to do. These rules are my lifeline. They will keep me alive, so I need to follow them. I know that now more than ever. I'm keeping my shoes on when I sleep tonight just in case, I decide as I turn on the lamp before switching off the main light.

I've been lying in bed for about 30 minutes when I hear it. The scratching again.

7. If you hear scratching at any point, either by your hut or by the outhouse, turn off all Radios and hide under your covers until the Scratching stops.

The scratching is faint. It sounds like it's coming from somewhere on the staircase, if not down below by the outhouse. Immediately, I rush to my big radio and switch it off. I check my small radio is off, which it is. I swiftly move back to my bed and get under the covers. The scratching continues. It gets louder. Each one is slow and long, mimicking the sound of nails against a wooden board. Each scratch is followed by around 10 seconds of silence, and then by another one that sounds closer than the last. Soon, the scratching feels as if it's right by me. Almost as if it's on the frame of my bed. I hold my breath and close my eyes. Not a rule, I'm just fucking terrified. The next scratch is longer than the rest. It's either on my bedframe or the door of my hut. I don't know. I can't think straight, but I'm not going to move.

The scratching has stopped now, for about 15 minutes. All I can hear is the rustling of the trees below as the wind whips through them, creating an atmospheric whooshing sound right past my hut. I have already made the decision to stay under my covers for the remainder of the night, just in case, when I hear another sound.

Faint footsteps.

Each fast thud increases in volume, as I realize she is sprinting up the staircase. In my panic, I forget the rule. Instinctively, I jolt out of bed and run to my main light switch. I turn it on, and the running immediately stops.

I am frozen. Standing by my light switch, waiting for something to happen, but nothing does. Trembling, I edge toward the list of rules, which I keep beside my bed, pick it up, and check that I've done the right thing.

5. At night, if you hear someone running up the stairs to your tower, turn on the main light until morning. If you don't do this by the time she's at the top, it's too late

Thank fuck. I had known that my main light was included in more than one of the rules and am so relieved that I'd chosen correctly. I am looking around the balcony surrounding my tower, and I see nothing. I stare at the top of the staircase for what feels like an eternity. But nothing happens, nothing comes up.

The bright glow of the main light makes it impossible to see out into the surrounding woods below, I think as I sit at my desk. It's been about two hours since she tried to run up my stairs, and there's no fucking way I'm going to be able to sleep tonight. So, I use my time wisely. I've been intensively reading the maps of the surrounding areas, trying to learn the routes around my tower like the back of my hand. However, I have also learned something else. I've managed to learn the route to the next closest tower. It's not too complicated. While I still think I can trust Allison, I want to actually meet her. I want to see her for myself and talk freely. Face to face, not hiding behind a radio.

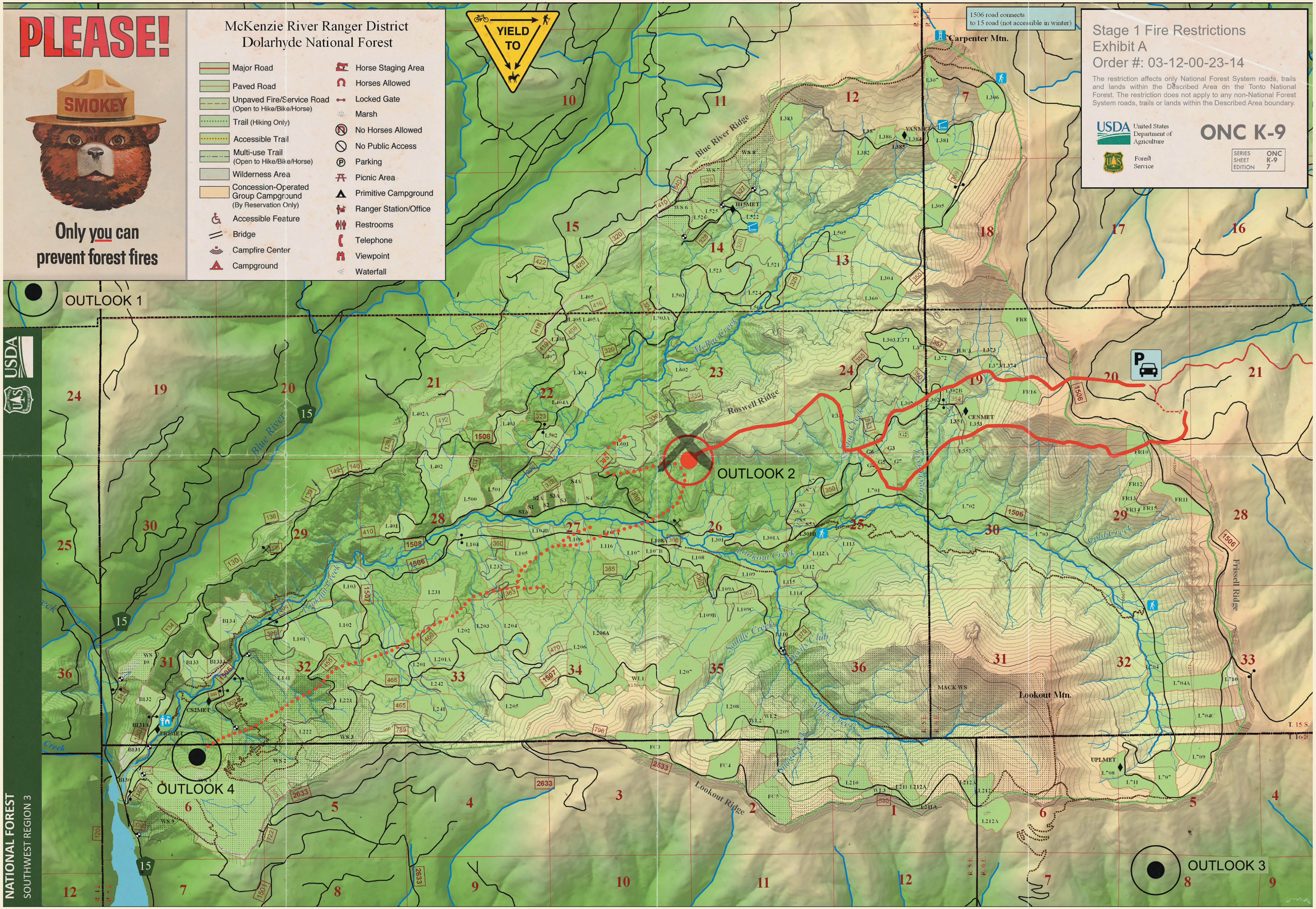
I've decided that tomorrow I'm going to go to Allison's tower.

I wake up early.

I'm only on a few hours' sleep, but it'll do. In fact, I'm too driven to even notice. I pack a light backpack—some food, water, flashlight, radio, my map, and my machete. I also bring the camera, to see if Allison can confirm if the man in the photos is actually Harvey.

The sunlight is peering over the outstretched trees. I've never really taken in the beauty of the sunrise; I'm usually either asleep or scared shitless.

But it is beautiful. I decide not to tell Allison I'm coming. While I do feel a degree of trust, I don't want to warn her of my whereabouts, giving her a chance to change or alter anything, just in case. I lace up my shoes and start the trek to Allison's tower. It should only take about


PLEASE!
SMOKEY
Only you can prevent forest fires
McKenzie River Ranger District
Dolarhyde National Forest
Major Road
Paved Road
Unpaved Fire/Service Road (Open to Hike/Bike/Horse)
Trail (Hiking Only)
Accessible Trail
Multi-use Trail (Open to Hike/Bike/Horse)
Wilderness Area
Concession-Operated Group Campground (By Reservation Only)
Accessible Feature
Bridge
Campfire Center
Campground
Horse Staging Area
Horses Allowed
Locked Gate
Marsh
No Horses Allowed
No Public Access
Parking
Picnic Area
Primitive Campground
Ranger Station/Office
Restrooms
Telephone
Viewpoint
Waterfall
YIELD TO
1506 road connects to 15 road (not accessible in winter)
Carpenter Mtn.
Stage 1 Fire Restrictions
Exhibit A
Order #: 03-12-00-23-14
The restriction affects only National Forest System roads, trails and lands within the Described Area on the Tonto National Forest. The restriction does not apply to any non-National Forest System roads, trails or lands within the Described Area boundary.
USDA United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service
ONC K-9
SERIES ONC
SHEET K-9
EDITION 7
OUTLOOK 1
OUTLOOK 2
OUTLOOK 3
OUTLOOK 4
Blue River Ridge
Blue River
McRae Creek
Roswell Ridge
Lookout Creek
Cold Creek
Frissell Ridge
Lookout Mtn.
Lookout Ridge
Saddle Creek
CENMET
VANMET
HI15MET
UPLMET
CS2MET
PRIMET
MACK WS
USDA
NATIONAL FOREST
SOUTHWEST REGION 3

three hours. The route is relatively direct, and judging from the map, I won't have too many steep climbs or anything.

I notice a stark difference as I venture out of my zone and into Allison's. Each lookout has a zone; they are to maintain the paths and deal with any issues that may arise within their zone. However, as I make the transition into Allison's, I notice that her paths are not well maintained. To be honest, they aren't maintained at all. Overgrown trees, bushes, and flora make me thankful I brought my machete as I hack away and continue along the barely visible paths. It is tiring work, but I want to make sure the paths are clear enough to run through, should I suddenly need.

TIM
BRAD-
STREET
2024

and starting to get hungry when I reach her tower. It has taken about five hours due to the work I had to put in clearing the paths, but I'm here now. The tower is exactly like mine, the same layout with the hut on top of the four stilts, huddled within a small opening in the woods. Her outhouse is on the opposite side, but her food bank is in identical position to mine, just left of the tower's base. However, there is one massive difference I immediately notice. *What the fuck?* The remains of a massive firepit, like that of a bonfire, around fifty feet from her tower. Surrounded by stones, it looks like one that someone has gotten good use out of. Considering our job is to make sure there are no fires at all in the woods, that's a bit fucking strange, isn't it?

I make my way up the tower. I'm relatively quiet as I do so, partly because I don't want her thinking I'm the Weeping Lady running up her stairs, but mostly because I'm nervous. Upon reaching the top, I can already see the tower has nobody in it. In fact, it looks like it never has had anyone in it. The hut has old nests along the top of it, old spider webs along the banisters, and dust literally everywhere. I go to open the door. It's locked. That's weird; my tower doesn't even have a lock. I peer through the glass, squinting to see through the thick layer of dust on the inside of the window.

It's dark; darker than it should be in there. I can make out the main radio on a table, next to a stack of what looks like newspapers and files. The bed, messy, unkept. There's a bag peeking out from under the bed; I'm guessing it's her rucksack. From what I can see, there are no books, no decks of cards, nothing to keep her occupied during the day. How does she stay sane?

I decide to radio her. I haven't trekked all this way to not meet her. I pick up my radio.

"Allison, come in."

"Hey," a fast reply, "what's up, Oscar?"

"Hey, just wondering," I say, as I decide to investigate a bit before letting her know I'm here, "whereabouts are you?"

"I'm in my tower, why?" she replies.

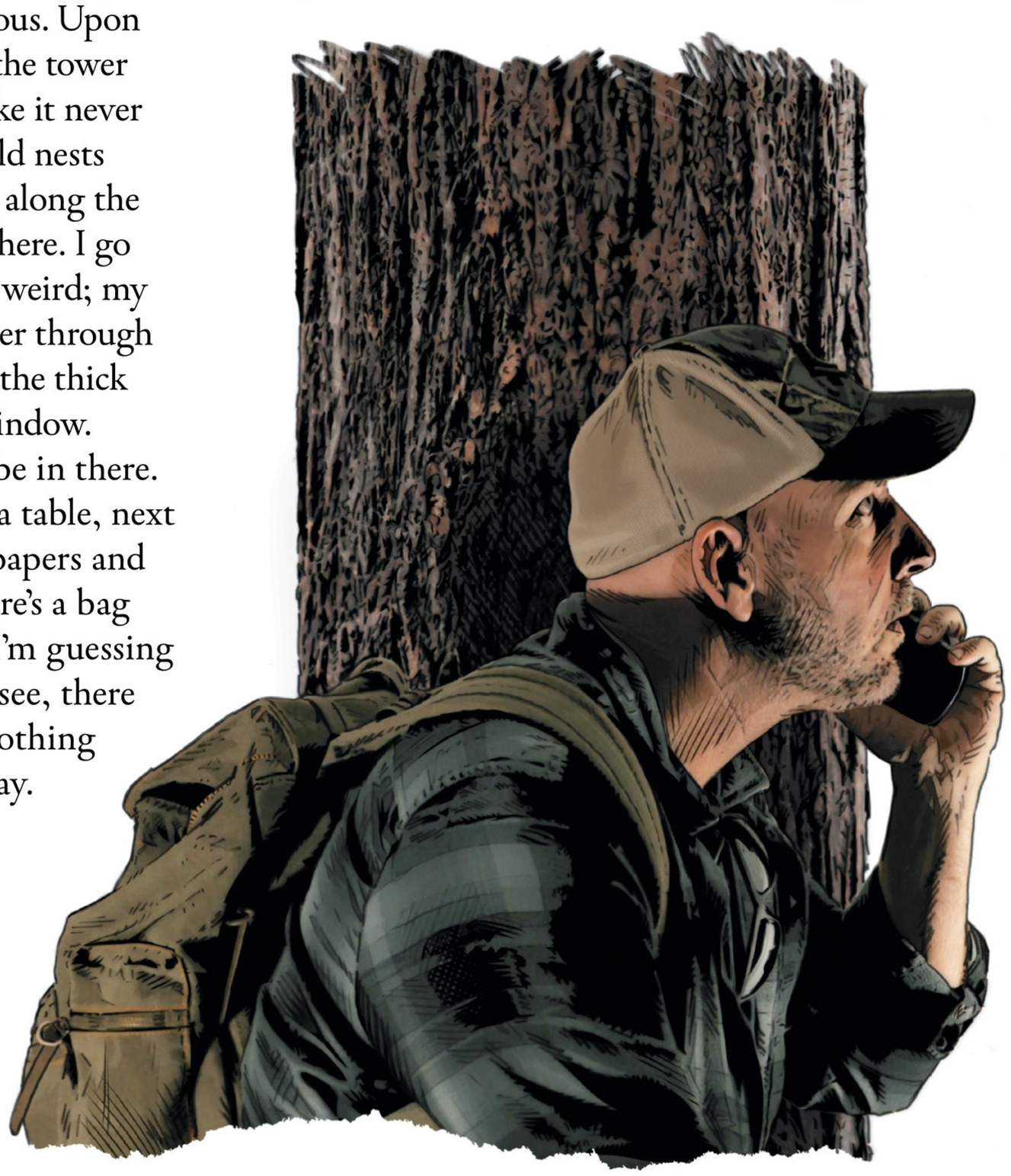
Uh, what the fuck? I'm certain that this is the right tower. This is her tower. I'm looking into it, and nobody's there. She's lying to me.

"Ah, it's nothing," I lie, trying to mask my trembling voice behind one of confidence. "Just some campers on the edge of my zone. I'll deal with them."

No reply. Did she buy it? Does she believe me? Reply, Allison. I need to know if you believe me or not.

"Cool, Oscar. Thanks for that!"

Okay, thank fuck. She believes me, I think. I decide to head down the tower and hide behind a tree nearby. I want to scope this out. Maybe she's just heading back to the tower; she said she was there already. It could just be a misunderstanding, so I'm going to scope the situation out and see what happens.



It's been over 30 minutes.

There's not been any sign of her, not any sign of anything. In fact, this area is completely quiet. Completely dead. Where is the rustle of animals, the sound of distant hikers? It is so quiet. *Too* quiet. During the wait, I had told myself that if she doesn't come back soon, I was going to break into her tower. I have no idea if that's illegal or not; it's technically the property of my employer, right? I'm guessing it is illegal, but I need to investigate. And I need to do it soon. Before it gets dark.

I hit the door with the butt of my machete, just above the doorknob. The loud bang breaks the eerie silence, followed by the creak of the door as it swings open, freezing me for a second as I wait for something to happen. Nothing. I head inside. Dust hits me and I hold myself back from coughing. I need to be quiet and I need to be fast. The inside of the hut is cold—weirdly colder than the temperature outside. I walk over to the stacks of newspapers and files. The headline for the first newspaper I see gives me chills:

Sister Hikers Missing

I skim the article. It's these woods. Two sisters missing. Was this Allison's sister? She only told me she had one sister missing. Is she the other one? This doesn't make sense. I skim through the rest of the newspapers, most just reiterating that two sisters were still missing. Until:

One Sister Found After Being Missing For Three Weeks

The article states that one of the sisters had been found alive and well, but the other was still missing. It reads that they were separated after getting lost in the woods. Allison hadn't mentioned that she had also gotten lost, if this was about her. Did she consider that too personal? Or did she lie? I turn my attention to the files.

Inside, one piece of paper. It's headlined "OSCAR." What the fuck? Under it, information about me—information I had shared with her about my divorce and why I took the job, my age, and also a description of what I look like. Maybe she kept these just so she wouldn't forget? An odd way of trying to be friendly? Wait, how does she know that? We've never met. How does she know what I look like? Something fucking weird is going on here. I turn my attention to the bag under the bed.

It's a big rucksack, dark blue. I pull it out and open it up. Inside, clothes. They look like male clothes: t-shirts, hiking pants, a rain jacket. I dig deeper. I find a hammer, and then a wrench. Nothing too out of the ordinary there. The next item I take out, a pair of sunglasses.

Engraved on the side: *RS*.

Initials? Definitely not Allison's, but somebody's. I reach my hand into the bottom of the bag and feel a small metallic object. I lift it out, revealing a pocket knife. It's a very nice knife, looks like something that someone has personally designed. It boasts a golden outline, and laced through it is a mix of wavy silver and black designs. There's something engraved on this too, in very small letters:

What the fuck? Why does she have Harvey's knife? Is this his stuff? Is this where his stuff went after he disappeared?

I'm not taking anything; she'll know I was here. But I'm getting out of here. I don't feel safe.

As I stand to leave, I hear a familiar voice behind me. Allison's voice.

"You know, all she wants is to make you cry."

I spin around. Behind me, a woman stands between me and the door. She is slightly shorter than me, with messy, unwashed blonde hair

that expels out at all angles. Her clothes: long, light brown hiking pants, ruined by old dirt and stains. Similarly, her light red checkered shirt looks like it's seen better days: wrinkled, dirty, a rip stemming from the end of one of her sleeves. Her face, normal, or at least, human. The bright blue irises of her eyes provide a direct contrast to their red, bloodshot surroundings. She looks like she hasn't slept in weeks. Her frenzied eyes scream insanity, looking at me manically, with her hands drooped by her side. Her frail body is one of malnourishment, one of abandonment.

"A-Allison," I stammer, "what do you mean she wants to make me cry?"

"She just wants you to cry," Allison replies, still staring at me with a crazed look in her eyes.

"Right, Allison, what is going on?" I try to act confident. "Are you okay?"

Allison moves toward the bed; I circle around the hut as she does so. I'm now by the door. A good start. She sits down on the bed and looks down at the dusty floor. I see a tear run down her face. This is a broken woman.

"We-we went missing," Allison gulps. "Both of us. And I got saved, and she didn't. I couldn't tell them what I did—but—but it was bad. And now she's..." she trails off.

"What did you *do*, Allison?" I'm ready to reach for my machete at any moment.

"We got lost. And we were lost for so long. She kept telling me, '*It's going to be okay, Allison, they'll find us, Allison*.' But they didn't. For so long. And I got so hungry. She was always so positive. Always. But food—we couldn't catch anything. Nothing worked. We *tried*, Oscar—I promise we tried," Allison says. Her voice strains.

"Okay, okay, Allison. I know you tried. What happened?"

She looks up. I jump, and she continues to speak. "She was looking at me, crying, when I pushed her. I pushed her far. Off the side. It was a moment of weakness, a moment of *hunger*. She fell so far...her arms, they...cracked. She wasn't moving. I was so *hungry*." She looks back to the ground. "She died crying."

My stomach churned. She killed her own fucking sister. I've heard hunger makes you do crazy things. I've heard it makes you do anything for food.

"But...after I pushed her, I just—I couldn't do it." She looks up at me once more, tears welling in her otherwise frantic eyes. "And the next day they found me."

My stomach drops. My god, they found her, only a day after that? While I am wary of her, I feel a sense of sympathy for Allison. I couldn't live with that—a moment of madness that would define my life forever, and for what? For literally nothing.

"And then she found me," Allison whispers as she looks back to the ground, another tear rolling down her cheek.

"Wh-*who* found you?" I ask, hoping it isn't who I think she'll say, my blood frozen.

"My sister. Still weeping. Still hungry," Allison murmurs. "She's taking revenge on me. And she's taking revenge on you." Allison stands up and looks back to me. "On all of you."

I take a small step back, backing out of the hut, not taking my eyes off of Allison.

"Wh-what have *I* done?" I ask.

"She blames you all. You couldn't find her. It's your job—*our* job—to find her. Instead, she found me. And I won't lose her again." Allison starts walking slowly towards me.

"Allison, I didn't even fucking work here. I—I had never even been to these woods." I am starting to panic as I take steps back. "Allison, we can get you help. We can get you out."

"She gets hungrier every time. She's never satisfied anymore. There is no getting out." As she says this, I know why the surrounding woods are so quiet. "Harvey even worked out the 10 rules, and she still got to him eventually. Rules not even I can work out."

Allison, for the first time, starts to cry, her rotting black teeth blending into her even darker gums.

"And, Oscar, she's so *hungry* now."

She lunges at me with a sudden, sharp screech, arms outstretched. Her weak frame is easy to overpower. I roll her to the side, and with a swift movement, I push her away from me.

She stumbles, and her foot slides off the side of the balcony. She loses her balance, hitting the wooden floor with a thud before falling from the side of the tower. It all happens so fast. I fall to the floor as I push her, mostly out of shock. I hear her hit something on the way down, probably the steps, followed by a solid thud as she meets the ground below. She didn't once scream as she fell. *Holy fuck*. I just killed her. *Holy fucking fuck*. I scramble to my feet and rush down the stairs, praying that she's not dead. When I reach the bottom, I see her lying around 10 feet from the tower's base. Face down. Arms broken, twisted. A small pool of blood oozes from her head, feeding the soil below. Her hand twitches, then her neck. But, save for that, all is still.

I'm running back to my tower, stopping briefly only when the exhaustion takes over. I should be able to get there before it's dark. Fuck this. I'm getting out of these woods. Allison's fucking insane. She attacked me—it was self-defense. She's fucking insane. However, something she said is really sticking with me: "*Harvey worked out the 10 rules.*" On the sheet, that I now know was written by Harvey, there were only nine. What is the tenth rule? This at least explains how Harvey survived for so long: a year. The poor man before him, Rick, who I now suspect owned the sunglasses in Allison's hut, only survived a week. But Harvey had rules. Nine, or 10, ways the Weeping Lady can get you and how to avoid her. I'm not sticking around to find out what the tenth is. I'm getting out of these woods.

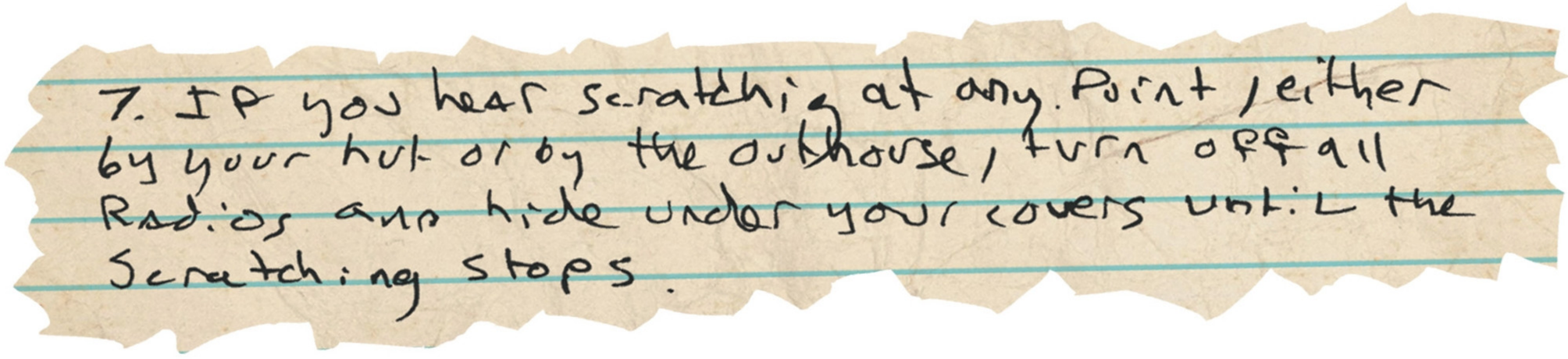
I'm still running back. I can feel something watching me.

I see my tower.

It's almost dark. I don't know how the fuck I'm going to get to my car, and I don't want to be walking these woods at night. So I've decided I'm going to sleep at the bunker. I figure that's where Harvey spent his nights when he wasn't at the tower. I figure that's key to how he survived for so long, and it's even saved me in the past. I'm going to run up to my tower, grab my main rucksack, and go to the bunker. I'm on the verge of passing out from dehydration, so I'm in need of more water, which is also up in my tower. I'll grab my things and go. In and out.

I'm in my tower. I frantically gather my things. I turn to leave.

I hear something. It's faint, easy to miss, but it's there. I hold my breath and stop moving, listening for what the sound is. Long, slow, quiet sounds. I hear scratching.



You're fucking kidding me. She knows. She knows I'm trying to leave. I'm frozen in place, hoping the scratching will stop, knowing that if it doesn't, I'll have to follow the rules.

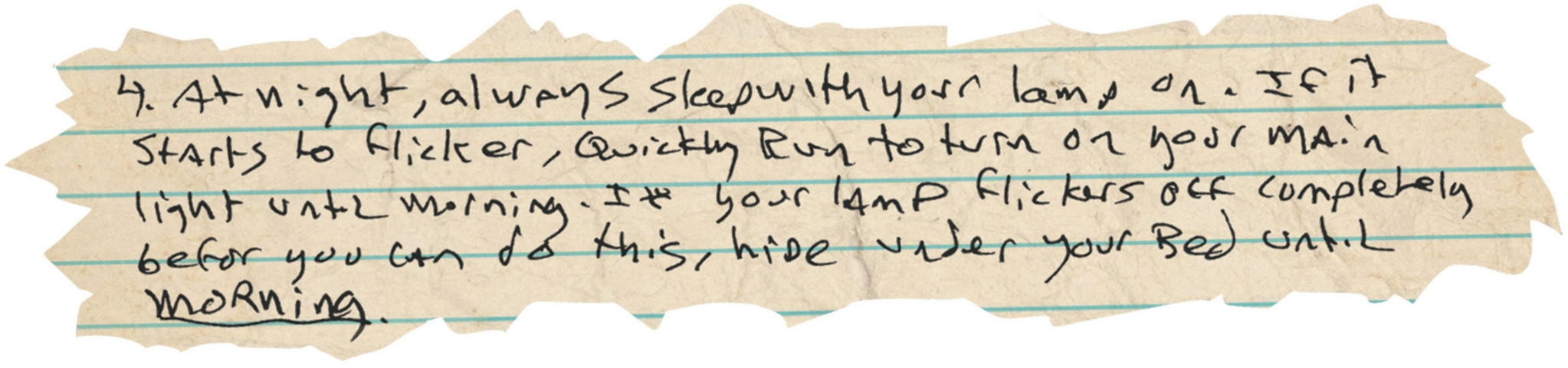
I turn to my radio. Just above it, in the woods directly below, I see a pale white face looking up at me. The same stringy, dark hair dangling from her head, her white skin illuminated by the surrounding darkness. I see none of her body, just her face emerging from the black of night. She's looking up at me, her excited eyes locked into mine. She knows I'm trying to escape.

I have to spend one last night here. And I feel like she's going to do everything she can to get me.

I break our gaze and turn the radios off before jumping under my covers. What Allison said to me is ringing through my mind over and over again.

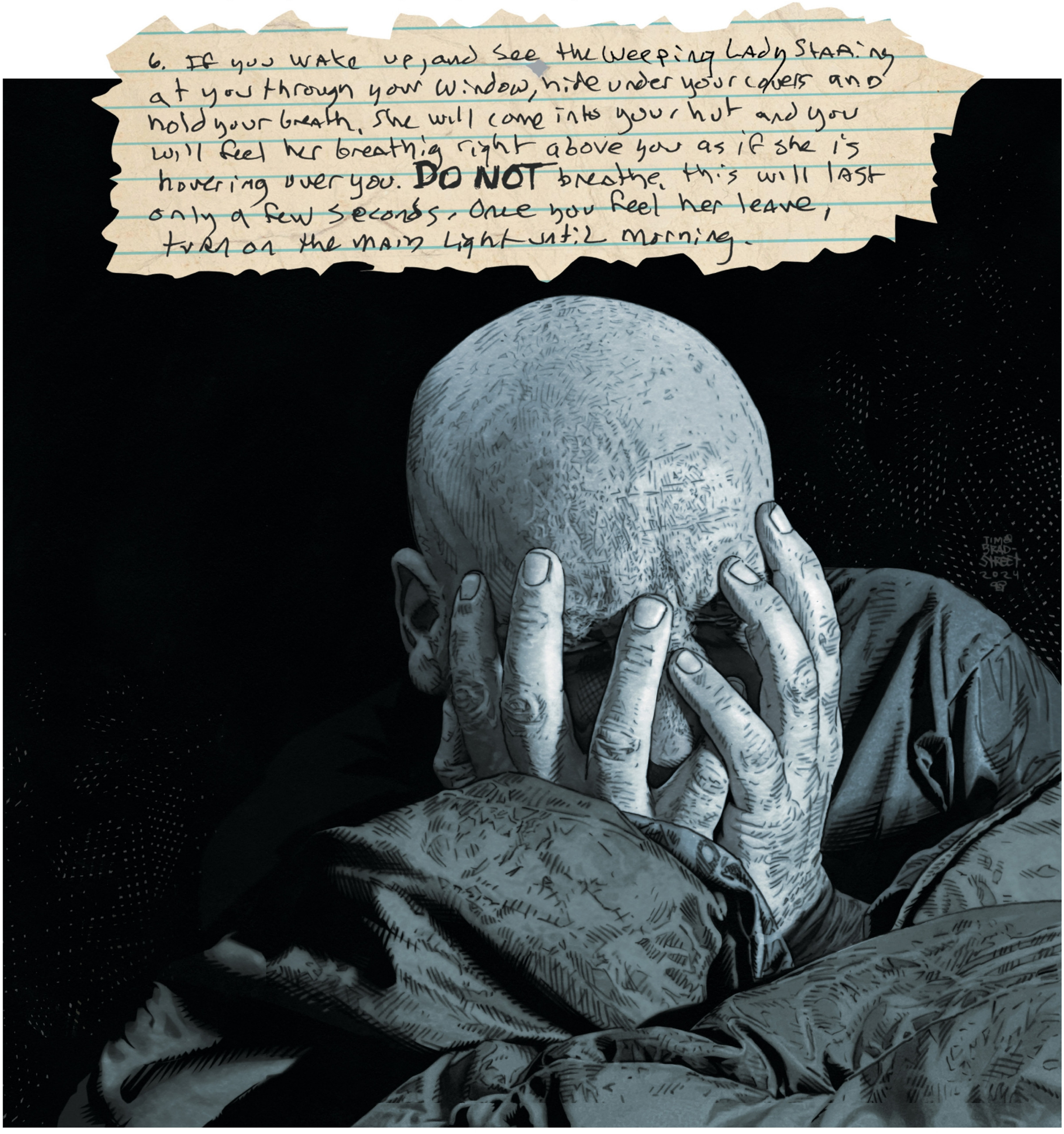
"She's so hungry now."

The scratching stops shortly after I go under my covers. I can literally feel her hunger in the air, looming around my tower, focusing in on me. I peek from my bed once I'm certain that the scratching noises have stopped. I don't want her to catch me off guard, I want to be ready for anything she throws at me. I stand up and circle around the balcony of my hut, scanning the surrounding area. Where she stood before, she no longer does. I knew she was fast; previously she had beaten me back to my tower when I had found her crying in the woods. She could be anywhere. I turn back to walk into my hut. I'm looking out one of the windows as the reflection of the dull lamp starts to flicker behind me. Shit.



LOOKOUT
2001
TIM & BRAD-STREET 2024

My eyes adjust as I look at the reflection of the lamp, and she's there. Right in front of me, through the glass, standing on my balcony. It's her. Her broken arms distended. Her straggly hair wet. Her eyes large, glistening with tears.



The lamp flickers once more, then shuts off, plunging me into darkness. I have two rules that I need to follow. Two conflicting rules. I can't look away from her, but I know I have to turn on the main light.

Her neck suddenly snaps to the side, and she starts to walk fast—I mean, *fast*, stomping loudly with each step as she makes her way around the balcony towards the door on the other side. *Oh fuck*. I turn and sprint to the main light. She's about halfway to the door when I turn it on, and now I have to decide whether I hide under the bed or under the covers.

I choose the covers. Rule 6 specified, "*She will come into your hut,*" and she's about to do that. I run toward my bed and pull the covers over my eyes. As I do so, I see the door of my hut open. I hear her loud, fast footsteps charging toward me, but I see only darkness now as I lay beneath the thick covers. I hold my breath.

I can feel her. Just as the rule said I would. She's right above me. I feel her breath. It's cold. My eyes are shut, but I know she's there. I'm trying to hold my breath. My heart is pounding out my chest, my stomach is churning in fear, but I refuse to breathe. Yet she waits, desperate for me to do so. What happens if I breathe? Will she kill me here and now? Will she possess me? My chest hurts. I can't hold it for much longer. She can sense it. She senses I'm struggling. Her exasperated breaths are getting more and more excitable. I feel her wet hair dangling on either side of me from above the covers. I can't do it. I need to breathe. This is it. I'm fucked. My mouth opens—

She's gone. She just vanished. I hold on for three or four seconds more, as long as I physically can, before coughing and gasping for air. But she's gone. No more cold breath, no more presence. I am alone again. I peel back the covers. My hut's door is wide open, swinging in the wind. My main light is still on, as is my lamp once more. Did she use the flickering of the lamp as an attempt to try to get me to fuck up? To choose the wrong rule? If I had chosen to hide under the bed, would she have killed me?

It's been quiet for a few hours. My main light is still on; so is my lamp. I feel slightly safer, but I think that's her game plan: to lure me into a false sense of security. I'm not letting my guard down. And thank fuck I don't. I see a fucking campfire. Right by my tower. The glare of the light from the hut makes it harder to see, but I see it. In fact, I see more than one. There are campfires all around my tower. I walk around the balcony's edge and count six fires. By each fire, there are dark, human figures with their backs turned toward me. What the fuck? They're all standing, one per fire, looking into it. The figures are of different sizes. One looks like a child. I can't make out any specific features in the darkness, just their shapes. By the sixth fire, there is no figure. Why is there no figure there? Just as my eyes start to adjust to the darkness below, the figures begin to fall into their fires. One by one.

The first to fall into its fire resembles a man. The figure is tall and skinny. He drops face first into the flames, almost willingly. As he squirms, the flames engulf him, making it impossible to make out any of his features. His screams pierce the air.

As I stare in horror, another figure, a woman, then falls into her fire. She screams as the flames cover her, writhing in the fire. But she does not attempt to escape it.

Next, the smallest figure. The figure of a child. A boy. As he falls face down into the fire, I gasp. I can't bring myself to scream, my whole body is in shock. The child is silent but twitching violently as the fire burns him.

Fourth, the largest silhouette. A wide, sturdy shape of a large man. He falls into his fire, grunting in pain, holding back screams, but barely moving as he burns.

Lastly, the shape of a woman. I turn to her before she falls. I need to see. I run inside, grab my flashlight, and run back to where I stood before. As she falls into her fire, I shine it upon her, catching only a glimpse of her messy blonde hair and red checkered shirt, a rip along

JIM
BRAD-
STREET
2024

its sleeve, before the flames take over.

There is just one fire left burning. The sixth fire. The fire with no figure by it.

As the screams of those below me echo into the night, I hear the faint sound of a woman crying. Somewhere in the trees below.

"Oscar," a voice calls out just as the first rays of sun peek through the trees. "Oscar, are you there?"

I run to the balcony, albeit cautious, and see Sam, Mark's daughter, standing below. She's in the same clothes as the last time I saw her.

"Sam!" I yell. "Sam, we have to get out of here! There—"

"Oscar," she shouts back, "Oscar, I know! I know everything. I know about Allison, about her sister! I know about Harvey and his family. About Rick! I know everything."

"We have to get out of here, Sam—"

"We can't, Oscar" she cries out. "We have to burn her! We have to burn Allison's sister!"

"Why the fuck do we have to burn her?!" I scream.

"That's rule 10, Oscar. She's going to follow you, no matter where you go. If you leave this place, she'll be a step behind you forever. Unless you burn her! That's rule 10—find her body and burn it!"

"How the fuck are we supposed to find her body?" I shout, defeated.

"I know where it is, Oscar," Sam smiles warmly in an attempt to calm me. "Let me explain everything on the way. It's nearby."

I've survived all the other rules. Now I just need to survive one more.

I grab my machete.

It makes sense that the Weeping Lady follows you out of the woods; that's why Harvey couldn't leave and neither could Allison. That's why Allison said there's no getting out, because there isn't. Unless we burn her. And Sam? Allison said Mark didn't have a daughter, but was that just to throw me off? To turn me against a potential ally? Either way, I don't fully trust Sam, not by a long shot. Definitely not until I hear what she has to say. So I grab my machete.

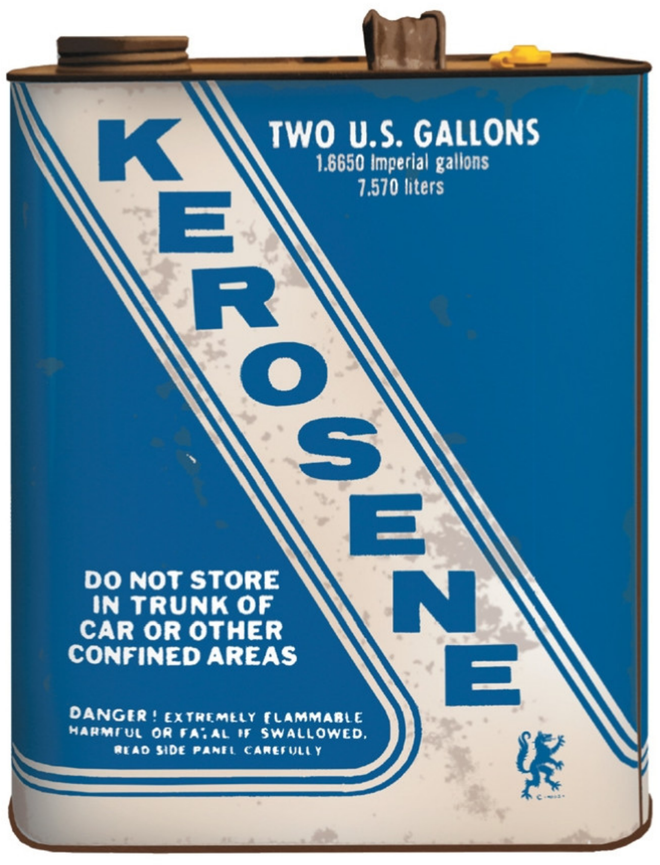
I edge down the steps, approaching Sam. She's looking at me. Her eyes dart to the machete, but she seems like she understands my caution.

"Why didn't you tell me all this before?" I ask. "If you know everything, why didn't you tell me when we first met?"

"I didn't know who to trust, Oscar," Sam explains. "I had known Harvey, and we trusted nobody, not fully, except each other."

"And Harvey's dead now." I'm solemn with my words. "How did you know him?"

"Yes, he is." She looks down. "That was confirmed last night. I struck up a friendship with him when he worked here. I'd bring him extra food and take runs just to see him. That's why I'm in these woods now; I was looking for him. But after last night, it's clear, yeah...he's dead."



"How was it confirmed last night?" I ask. She seems genuinely heartbroken.

"The lady, the Weeping Lady, she seems to focus on one victim at a time. While she's hunting someone, it seems like she ignores everyone else. That's why Allison kept *feeding* her people, so that her sister wouldn't turn on her," Sam explains.

My breathing is heavy, my heart racing.

She carries on. "Last night I was out looking for Harvey, as I've been doing. I saw the fires around your tower, and I saw those figures falling into them. People she's taken. One of those figures resembled Harvey—and some of the others, his family. I saw the sixth fire, the one she made for you, and I heard her crying to try to lure you out. She focuses on her prey one at a time, which confirms that you're her target. She's already got Harvey. She never gives up on her prey until she gets them. And it's you now. You have to burn her."

"But-but I killed Allison, not her! I pushed her when she attacked me, so why did I see her fall into a fire last night?" I'm shaking. I haven't actually said aloud before that I've killed her.

"Yes, I thought you might have. The Weeping Lady wouldn't have attacked her while she was focused on you. But it doesn't mean that, since Allison's death, the Weeping Lady hasn't taken her. Hasn't *eaten* her. She's always *hungry*. It's all she cares about."

"Wh-why-why don't you just burn her fucking body?!" I shout. This is fucked up. I'm desperate for a way out of this nightmare.

"It has to be *you*. It has to be the one she's hunting. I've fucking tried, but I only found her body after Harvey disappeared.

Whenever I try to burn it, the flames wont light. I don't fucking understand it, but I know it has to be you. She lit a fire for you last night, and it has to be you who lights hers."

"How the fuck can I trust you?" Tears roll down my cheeks. It makes sense why she was looking for Harvey; she needed him to burn her body.

Sam pleads, "I hid in a bunker last night. That's how I'm here so early. It was Harvey's bunker, Oscar. The Weeping Lady doesn't know about it, that's how he survived so long. I can show you where it is if—"

"I know where it is," I whisper.

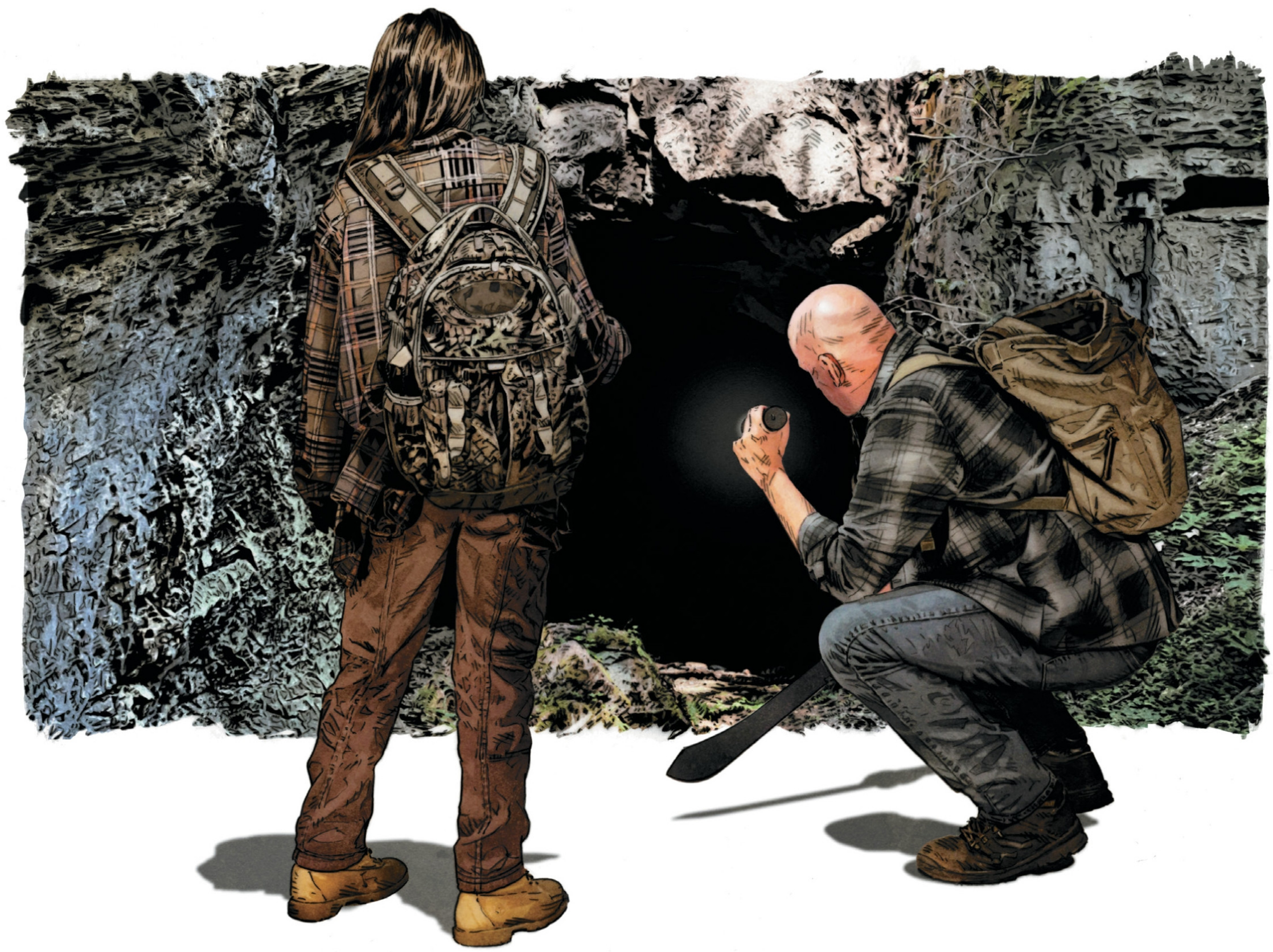
I have no choice. I have to trust her. I have to burn the body. I quickly go upstairs and grab my rucksack. In it, I put my lighter and a canister of kerosene.

I'm going to follow Sam, but I'm not letting go of my machete.

Of course we're going into a fucking cave.

On the way, Sam explained that after being pushed, Allison's sister had crawled here in an attempt to find shelter but had succumbed to her injuries within the cave. She explained that's why I may have seen her crawling, because the Weeping Lady is replaying her final moments on a loop, which drives her hate. That also explains why she's always weeping—Allison said she was crying when she pushed her. As Sam stands by the cave, creviced into the side of a steep hill, I shine my flashlight into its entrance.

I don't see much. It's a thin, tunnel-like structure. Around eight feet across, fifteen feet tall. There isn't much room to maneuver should we run into any trouble. I can't see far enough



into it to see where it ends. We enter the cave.

"She's near the end of the cave," Sam whispers. "There's a turn at the end, maybe 300 feet inward. We should be safe, I've never seen her ghost in the day before..." Sam trails off.

She leads the way. I'm keeping a close eye on her, but that becomes harder the further in we get. Soon we are enveloped in darkness. The light from our flashlights is all I can see as we leave the daylight behind us and enter the dark. Sound soon becomes nonexistent, our footsteps and shallow breathing our only company. Almost as if out of nowhere, we meet a wall. To the left, a downward slope that takes us deeper into the cave's abyss.

"Why the fuck would she go so deep," I whisper, "if she was wanting to be rescued?"

"She didn't," is Sam's hushed reply. "She was at the entrance when she died. Someone moved her further in to protect her. I think Allison."

We walk deeper.

About ten minutes of crouched walking later, the cave expands. Usually, spending this amount of time in a dark atmosphere means your eyes adjust; however, mine haven't. It's as if this is a type of darkness I haven't experienced before, or the Weeping Lady has put some weird effect on us. I don't fucking know. I just know that other than the light from my flashlight and Sam's in front of me, I can't see shit.

A crack behind me. A quick, snapping crack.

My heart jumps, and I spin around to shine my flashlight where the sound originated. I see only legs, for a split second, crawling away from me into the darkness from which I came. The bare, dirty calves of what resemble a woman, shooting out of sight. Fuck. She's in here with us. The Weeping Lady is here. I turn to Sam.

She's gone.

What the fuck?! I'm alone. Sam's flashlight is on the ground. What the fuck, where is she?! Do I call out? Fuck, I don't know. I'm going to leave her flashlight; I need a hand free to grip my machete. I can't go back; the Weeping Lady is behind me. I need to find her body, and I need to burn it. And then I need to help Sam. I'm shining my flashlight around when I see a backpack leaning against the cave's wall. I carefully move towards it, knowing something is watching me from the darkness. My sweaty palms make the machete more difficult to grip, but I squeeze it as hard as I can. I get to the backpack, quickly scanning the cave around me with the flashlight, seeing nothing but rock. I turn my attention to the bag's contents. It's already open; it doesn't look like it's been here too long. I hurriedly go through it: an old tarp, a lighter, and the same small canister of kerosene I had taken—the same type that was provided for me at the tower. Also in the bag, a knife. The same style of knife I had found in Allison's tower, only bigger. The same gold outline, with silver and black designs swimming through it. On the knife, engraved:

Your Pair of Knives. Our Pair of Hearts. My Harvey.

Another one of Harvey's knives. This is Harvey's bag. I flick the knife open, its previously sharp edge now blunt, stained with remnants of stone. I sit back and shine my flashlight on the wall the bag leaned against. Writing, etched into the rockface:

10. SAM LIES

Cracking behind me. I spin around and see Sam. She's weeping.

TIM & BRAD-STREET. 2024

"Sam—" I start.

Her eyes are locked with mine. She sees me through the darkness. Her arms start to break. As if being broken by the very air around them, they snap with violent jolting movements. Her elbows bend backwards as her bones jut out, hugging the skin under her forearms. With every crack, she cries more. Soon, she is crying uncontrollably, tears streaking down her face. Her skin grows whiter, her hair longer. She is now unrecognizable as Sam. I now know her as the Weeping Lady.

I have fallen for it.

Just as Harvey had. She needs the darkness, that's why she's roams at night. That's why I felt I was being watched as I left Allison's tower; I was, but she couldn't do anything due to the sunlight. She watched me as Sam during the day and attacked me as the Weeping Lady during the night. That note in Allison's tower explaining what I look like. Only Sam had seen me before then. *Fuck*. I feel so fucking stupid. I was safe from her in the daylight. But it's dark now. And she's changing.

She died in the dark, and now she lives in the dark.

I stand up, my machete shaking in my hand. I edge toward her. I'm ready to strike.

In an explosion of movement either side of me, I am grabbed. The creatures crawl at me as I feel their bony hands and arms dragging me down. I count five of them as I struggle against their grip. There are too many. They are too strong. My flashlight has fallen from my grip and now shines in my direction. I make out the faces of my attackers.

Harvey. His wife. His child. A tall man, Rick. And Allison.

They hold me down, Allison's broken arms cutting me as I struggle, her shattered bones sharp. As they all pin me against the ground, they cry.

I catch a glimpse of Sam as she lunges out of the darkness and bites into my chest.

A new man lives in my tower now.

He has a family, a dog too, who visit him.

We only leave the darkness when she tells us to.

She doesn't want to lose us.

I cry now.

And when she tells me to burn, I burn too. ■

A STORY TO SCARE MYSELF

Growing up in Southeast Asia, alongside cultures from all around the world, I was surrounded by supernatural tales from every corner of the globe. It was this which first sparked my interest in horror as a young kid. I developed a fascination with these stories, reading basically everything I could, learning about the ghosts and demons that grip people's minds at night. As I did this, I fell in love with the genre. Name a horror movie, and I've likely seen it (sometimes as a child when I definitely shouldn't have...). Consequently, I built up what I can only describe as a bit of a tolerance to fear. It takes a lot for a movie or a story to scare me or give me the creeps.

Eventually, I moved to Glasgow, Scotland in 2015, where I still live. But let's fast forward to the year 2020 when the world as we knew it suddenly shut down. Covid-19 meant the closing of borders, shops, restaurants, schools—almost everything. I suddenly had a lot of free time on my hands as the gym where I worked also closed and I was stuck indoors. I used my time wisely, reading horror stories, mainly on Reddit — specifically a subreddit called NoSleep. As I read more and more, I even put them on as an audiobook before I fell asleep at night. The stories were incredible, complete works of art!

I kept coming back for more—some creeped me out, some made me uncomfortable, some drew me in.

But none truly scared me.

I wanted to be scared.

I thought, "I'm going to write a story that will scare *me*."

And that's what I did in my cramped flat in 2020. I wrote a story that scares me. I wrote *Look Out*.

I placed myself in the shoes of Oscar, the main character, asking myself, "What would scare the shit out of me?" And this became reality in Oscar's life. I had created a story which I found truly frightening!

I posted the first part online and it blew up. People were messaging me asking for more parts and I obliged. What started as an attempt to portray what scares *me* was judged by my readers to be a fleshed out, epic tale full of betrayal, suspense and fear.

Within the story, I included subtle hints that foreshadow the future or play with the mind of the reader. Only the keenest of eyes will spot them—I challenge *you* to do so!

Recently divorced Oscar moves to his isolated new job, hoping to find his happy place. Safe to say, the job is not solitary after all—and the place is anything but happy!

Something's in the woods. It knows he's there. It's watching, yet hidden.

Oscar isn't alone here.

Maybe you're curious about the setting...Why a lookout tower? To answer that, I must go back a few years, to my childhood, to walking down the narrow, dark beach road near my house, past the daunting, abandoned lookout tower that appeared to stretch upward forever. I'd often look up at the tower, wondering when it was last used, when the steps were last trod upon.

"That'd make a creepy setting for a horror story," I thought whenever I walked by the lonely tower.

"Nobody could hear anyone screaming up there, and if you were in the tower, you certainly wouldn't be able to hear whatever's lurking below..."

I loved writing this story and loved reading the numerous messages from my fellow horror fans over the course of its online life (I still get some now!). And I am excited by the direction it's now taken as a graphic novel. Coupled with the amazing art from none other than Tim Bradstreet, *Look Out* has truly come to life. Fans can now not only read of Oscar's fear but *live* it. They can live my fear, the fear that I put into the story all those years ago. With some exciting changes from the original story I posted, it's even more exhilarating, disturbing, and scary.

I'm keen to see what's next for the look out that sits lonely in the woods. Oscar's story isn't the first to take place here, but will it be the last? I'd love to explore writing more about this haunted tower.

Over the past five years, I've written only a handful of horror stories, so I still feel like I'm

new to this world. I'm honored that you have chosen to read my tale, honored to share it with *you*. When I first posted it all those years ago, I just wanted to scare one person.

Now, I get to scare loads.

That makes me happy.

Enjoy Oscar's story.

Dan Baillie
March 2025

AFTERWORD

Writing this a few days after viewing *Companion*, yet another superior horror thriller produced by Roy Lee and Vertigo Entertainment, I'm a bit giddy. A potent blend of dark comedy and science fiction-laced horror, *Companion* is exactly the kind of movie that has become a signature of Roy's *oeuvre*, and exactly the kind of story that appeals to me as a viewer and editor.

From *The Ring* to *Strange Darling* to *Late Night with the Devil* to *Barbarian*, Roy has produced some of the finest horror movies of our era—stories that explore every nook and cranny that the horror genre has to offer. So you can see why I leapt at the chance to collaborate with him to curate and produce the "Future of Fear" collection—five self-contained double-sized one-shot graphic novellas that will leave no gravestone unturned in an attempt to scare the daylights out of you.

To say our curation process cast a wide net is an understatement. Take, for instance, our first one-shot, *Look Out*, which was originally posted as a Reddit thread entitled "I Took a Job as a Fire Lookout" by hobbyist Scottish writer Dan Baillie. A taut psychological thriller that takes full advantage of its eerie setting, Baillie's story caught the attention of Roy and his team, and eventually me. The setup for our story is simple: When a thirty-something man named Oscar, recuperating from a divorce, takes a job as a fire lookout in a remote forest outpost, he unearths a mangled sheet of paper inscribed with a strange set of rules that promise to keep him safe during his watch. He laughs it off as a prank—a bit of light hazing from the other fire lookouts in the area—but when night falls, he discovers that the rules, and the threat they protect against, are all too real. As Oscar explores the forest around him, his only companion the voice of a fellow lookout on his walkie-talkie, he gradually realizes he has stepped into a world of trouble. Forays into the forest reveal hidden caverns, phantom campfires, abandoned tents, and complex mysteries, at the center of which stands the mysterious Woman Who Cries. Having spent six months wandering the Alaskan tundra in my youth, I know a thing or two about the profound horror that can be brought on by prolonged solitude in nature, and let me tell you, this story probes every corner of it. Even when the horrors out there are just in your imagination, the forest fucks with your head. But if they're *real*!?

There was only one problem with *Look Out*: To fit this complex, slowly-unfolding, narrator-driven story into the shortened format would require wielding a scalpel that we were highly reluctant to use. The solution: we decided to publish a lightly edited, somewhat updated version of the story in its entirety as illustrated prose, and we tapped the perfect artist to realize that potential: iconic illustrator Tim Bradstreet, whose covers for *Punisher MAX* and *John Constantine: Hellblazer* are the stuff of legend. Highly inspired by the story, Tim went way overboard to produce more than 30 full-color painted illustrations, each of which vividly captures a key moment in the story—so many, in fact, that we had to bump up the page count to fit them. You'll want to pause to savor each one. The experience is downright—what's the word I'm looking for?—*cinematic*.

Who knows, maybe you'll see it on a big screen soon...

Axel Alonso
March 2025